

VZCZCXRO2758
OO RUEHCHI RUEHDT RUEHHM
DE RUEHML #3279/01 2740249
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
O 010249Z OCT 07
FM AMEMBASSY MANILA
TO RUEHZS/ASSOCIATION OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN NATIONS IMMEDIATE
RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 8436
INFO RHHMUNA/CDRUSPACOM HONOLULU HI IMMEDIATE

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 MANILA 003279

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

STATE PASS USAID

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [EAID](#) [MOPS](#) [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [RP](#) [SOCI](#)
SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR INAUGURATES FOUR ASSISTANCE PROJECTS IN
JOLO CITY

REF: MANILA 1094

¶1. SUMMARY: The Ambassador highlighted continued U.S. assistance to conflict areas in the southern Philippines with a visit to Jolo City on September 24 to inaugurate four assistance projects, three of which were conducted in partnership with the British government. Traveling with UK ambassador Peter Beckingham and Philippines Armed Forces Chief of Staff General Hermogenes Esperon, the Ambassador's trip reinforced the message that social assistance to improve basic infrastructure and generate employment opportunities is a key element in U.S. efforts against terrorism in the Philippines. The centerpiece project was the opening of a paved bridge and road in the heart of Jolo City that will link the port area to the market complex. Warmly received by local officials and residents, the events were well covered by local and national media. END SUMMARY.

A FOCUS ON ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

¶2. At the Ambassador's invitation, the UK ambassador and General Esperon accompanied her and other Embassy officials to Jolo on September 24 to inaugurate four assistance projects, three of which featured British government participation. Jolo is located on Sulu island, which continues to be a conflict area with members of terrorist organizations like the Abu Sayyaf Group and Jemaah Islamiyah using the island as a base of operations. The United States Agency for International Development (USAID), the Joint Special Operations Task Force - Philippines (JSOTF-P) and the Philippine government have undertaken a series of public works, civil affairs programs, and economic development projects to reduce the influence of terrorist groups on the local population.

¶3. Kicking off the visit was the opening of the Jolo Market Road, a project valued at \$480,000. Jolo City, with a population of 88,000 (out of approximately 650,000 on Sulu island) is the center of trade, commerce, and industry in the Sulu Archipelago. The vast majority of its inhabitants are Muslim. The Ambassador presided over the handover ceremony that included the governor of Sulu, the mayor of Jolo, and numerous local officials. In her remarks, the Ambassador stressed the importance of economic development and partnership between the U.S. and Philippine governments to promote peace and prosperity. The road project connected the busiest market in the province to its main port. The opening of the road is expected to facilitate more rapid transfer of incoming goods and outgoing products, creating a direct economic benefit for Jolo's residents.

PROJECTS BRING CLEAN WATER TO VILLAGERS,

14. At the Provincial Capitol building, the Ambassador participated in a ceremony to inaugurate a potable water system funded by the British Embassy and provided through USAID's Alliance for Mindanao Off-Grid Renewable Energy Project. The water system serves four communities and benefits 1,200 people. The sanitary and economic benefits of the project were immediately apparent as villagers commented on their improved health and cost savings they were enjoying since the system went into use. Beneficiaries said that prior to the projects implementation, they would spend much of their income on water and that the time to travel to and from water sources could consume half of their day. After the two ambassadors symbolically "turned on the taps," village leaders and children thanked them for the project.

15. Another joint economic development project involved a turnover ceremony of aquaculture production materials to former combatants from the Moro National Liberation Front. The program teaches the participants how to farm abalone and lobster, both lucrative products for local and export markets. The Ambassador met recipients who had benefited from equipment provided by the British Embassy and technical assistance and training from USAID's Growth with Equity in Mindanao Program. Of approximately 3,400 former Moro National Liberation Front combatants in Sulu Province who are participating in USAID economic assistance programs, about 500 have been helped to diversify into aquaculture.

LOCAL POLITICAL SUPPORT EVIDENT

MANILA 00003279 002 OF 002

16. Throughout the visit, the Ambassador was accompanied by Sulu governor Sakur Tan and the mayor of Jolo. Tan has stated publicly his desire for peace in Sulu and that he will work hard to achieve it. He has acknowledged that military offensives and economic development are necessary to achieve a prosperous Sulu, and recently has voiced his dream of turning Sulu into a tourist destination. During her meeting with Tan, the Ambassador complimented him on his cooperation with the Philippine military and emphasized the need to continue along the parallel paths of stability and development (there are about 5,000 Philippine combat troops on Sulu). The Ambassador informed Tan of the recent approval of \$3.7 million in U.S. 1207 funds to modernize the Jolo airport and municipal water system, projects Tan said would be a huge boon to the community.

SURFING AT SULU HIGH SCHOOL

17. The day's events culminated at Sulu National High School, where the Ambassador and her British colleague handed over a computer lab with internet access to eager teachers and students. Previously, the school had limited computer facilities, but with a student population of 1,800, there was a high demand for more computers and higher speed access. The school also is making the new equipment available to the public after hours, furthering the ability to educate local residents. Sulu National High School is one of 13 schools assisted by USAID's Computer Literacy and Internet Connection Program in Sulu. Schools that participate in USAID's Computer Literacy and Internet Connection Program report higher demand on enrollment, improved school completion rates by students, and greater use of internet based curriculum resources by school teachers. After her remarks, the Ambassador toured the lab and spoke with students about the opportunities provided by the new equipment.

18. COMMENT: As in previous visits to Jolo, the Ambassador

was welcomed with enthusiasm. Thousands of residents turned out at the days' events to express their appreciation for U.S. assistance. The extensive network of USAID projects, combined with a steady program of JSOTF-P civil affairs events are bearing fruit in the form a populace that is open to the idea of a combined U.S.-Philippine effort to combat terrorism and bring peace to Sulu. END COMMENT.

KENNEY